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SUBJECT: GHANA ELECTIONS: BUSSING STUDENTS FOR POLITICAL
GAIN

11. (U) SUMMARY. Members of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) party in Cape Coast physically prevented a group of university students from transferring their voting district to this university town in Ghana's Central Region early this week. According to NDC party officials, the students had been bussed from campus to the local EC. An NDC official said that the buses were paid for by Kennedy Agyapong, the ruling New Patriotic Party's MP from the Assin North district of Central Region, which borders on the Ashanti Region. The NDC members successfully stopped the students from changing their polling stations, but police had to intercede to prevent violence. END SUMMARY

12. (U) On a trip to Cape Coast on Tuesday to speak with regional party officials and the Regional Electoral Commission director, Emboffs stumbled into a partisan conflict that had just erupted. The opposition NDC accused the ruling NPP party of trying to rig the election for Cape Coast's member of Parliament (a seat for which there is no incumbent and which the NDC is favored to capture) by bussing large numbers of students who were registered in their home constituencies in the NPP stronghold Ashanti Region to transfer their votes to Cape Coast. (NOTE: Cape Coast is a community with a large number of college and university students who have the choice of registering to vote either in their home constituencies or where they attend school. END NOTE). When the NDC got wind of the busloads of students arriving at the Metropolitan Electoral Commission (EC), they summoned party faithful to assemble at the EC to protest the mass transfer. Confronted by the NDC protesters--who reportedly had been joined by non-partisan community members fed up with students playing such a large role in determining their political fortunes--the EC suspended the exercise.

13. (U) The Central Region's regional minister (a political position appointed by the President) appeared at the protest and was jeered by the crowd who accused him of masterminding the vote transfers. Police arrived on the scene shortly thereafter and escorted the regional minister away from the increasingly vociferous protest.

14. (U) A regional organizer for the NDC, located at their Cape Coast office, told Emboffs that even though it was legal for voters to transfer their polling place, the mass bussing by the ruling party was a move that they could not accept. If individual students want to vote in Cape Coast, he said, the NDC would accept that, but this was a blatant partisan intervention. They alleged that Kennedy Agyapong, the NPP's member of Parliament from a neighboring Central Region constituency, had paid the students and provided the transportation in an attempt to help the NPP's Cape Coast parliamentary candidate win the election. (NOTE: Central Region is a crucial swing area in which the NDC hopes to make substantial gains in this year's election. END NOTE). The NDC official also expressed concern when another party official informed him that an NPP rally was planned that evening for a location near where the NDC's supporters would

be gathering.

15. (U) Emboffs next called on Samuel Tettey, regional director of the Central Region Electoral Commission, who acknowledged that the EC had suspended the transfers. He planned to meet with both parties in the hope of arriving at an amicable solution, but said that the EC was opposed in principle to mass transfers by any political party. When asked about reports that the central Electoral Commission had been releasing funds to district ECs as much as 3 months late, he conceded that had also been the case in Central Region. "We have had to buy some things on credit," he said, "but petrol stations and the like know that we will come through with the funds we owe." He said, however, that his regional office was totally prepared for the election and he expected no problems with the process.

16. (U) On the drive back to Accra late Tuesday afternoon, Emboffs ended up behind a large NDC campaign truck with loud speakers blaring NDC campaign songs and slogans. We purposely remained behind the truck for several kilometers to gauge reaction along the road. While not a scientific study, it is worth noting that support from villagers, cyclists, motorists, and vendors along the route was positive, enthusiastic, and exuberant.
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